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Contents

Streszczenia

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Social Responsibility of Organizations. Directions of Changes ISSN 1899-3192
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CSR, ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY AND BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES. A MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEPTIONS AND TRUST*

Summary: The text elaborates on the growing significance of CSR discourse for constructing organizational identities and shows how CSR as a dominant business paradigm of last decades is capable of evoking behaviors, when it is used as a distinguishing feature of organizations. The paper starts with providing an overview of existing empirical evidence of the CSR-induced behavioral effects. Recent advancements in management and organization studies, including marketing, HR and identity literature are presented, showing that organizational stance towards CSR is critical for creating the patterns of company–consumer identification, loyalty, positive attitudes and perceptions and in consequence, purchase intent. The paper follows with the presentation of the concept of organizational identity and shows how the centrality of stakeholders remains a focal point in identity construction as well as in the CSR paradigm. In the remaining sections the paper discusses the role of perceptions and trust as key antecedents of purchase intent and posits that mechanisms of CSR-induced behavioral effects have a potential to create a real social change if they can foster reciprocity by setting the standards for social justice and fairness.

Keywords: CSR, organizational identity, stakeholders, perceptions.

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1. Introduction

Current state of art within the domain of corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be characterized by the complexity of definitions [Marrewijk 2003; Dahlsrud 2008] on the one hand and the heterogeneity of models [Pedersen, Neergaard 2009] providing conceptualizations on the structure of CSR [Pedersen, Neergaard 2009], on the other. The models often underline different aspects such as priority for economic rationale

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in the structure of goals, as in Carroll's CSR pyramid [1979, 1991, 1999] or aligned interests and benefits for multiple stakeholders, as in the triple bottom line concept [Elkington 1998].

Those conceptualizations aim at making CSR easier to operationalize in the business context. Undoubtedly, thinking about CSR developed over the last few decades from initially skeptical views, as illustrated by Friedman's claim that "CSR is improper philanthropy executed arbitrarily by managers who use shareholder's money in order to satisfy their own needs" [Sacconi 2013], towards acceptance that it might actually reflect the preferences of consumers rather than managers. The latter is exemplified in Baron's view that while CSR is done at the discretion of managers and uses a proportion of company's profit, it does satisfy consumer's need for doing good [Sacconi 2013].

Two views of company level CSR stem from that: the instrumental one, which does not imply any change to the objective function of a firm and assumes that CSR can be pursued within core business and a profit maximization paradigm and the one which assumes a differentiation of a product to accommodate socially oriented preferences of customers.

Given the above, CSR can be defined as such a way of running business which considers interests of different stakeholders to promote a sustainable development within three dimensions: economic, environmental and social [Henderson 2001].

Under such a stakeholder centered view, CSR policies depict a way in which organizational operations affect its stakeholders [Waddock, Bodwell 2004]. For that reason, the issue of CSR behavioral outcomes becomes critical for understanding how firms relate to their environment and shape markets. The following section describes a background of the contemporary empirical research on CSR.

2. The domains of CSR influence

Irrespective of an ongoing debate about legitimacy of businesses' alleged responsibilities and obligations towards society [Crane, Matten 2004], literature is rich with studies on CSR's impact on organizational as well as individual outcomes.

As for the organizational level, CSR was shown to influence financial results of firms [Rodriguez et al. 2006]. It is a source of competitive advantage [McWilliams, Siegel 2001] and an important component of strategy [Porter, Kramer 2006]. The latter can be clearly seen in the substantial increase of CSR reporting, which became a standard in the majority of organizations [The Economist 2005] and in general consensus that CSR is an important aspect of simply a good business, if done properly [Franklin 2008].

On the individual level, ability of CSR to generate behavioral outcomes is a domain of marketing literature, explaining issues such as purchase intent dynamics [Sen, Bhattacharya 2001; Mohr, Webb 2005], as well as HR literature, explaining why employees are attracted by organizations with solid CSR policies [Backhaus et al. 2002; Bauer, Aiman-Smith 1996; Behrend et al. 2009; Greening, Turban 2000; Kim, Parke 2011; Gully et al. 2013; Tsai, Yang 2010].

Identification [Jones 2010; Kim et al. 2010; Rupp et al. 2013; Gully et al. 2013; Grant et al. 2008] and identity literature [Marin et al. 2009; Pérez, del Bosque 2012; Fukukawa et al. 2007; Marin, Ruiz 2007; Balmer et al. 2007] offer substantial insights into the mechanisms of employee and company–consumer identification, which results in reputational effects and loyalty.

CSR plays an important role in managing stakeholder relations and corporate values [Hughes, Demetrious 2006] and it might be looked upon as a signal sent out by firms in order to reduce uncertainty.

Firms communicate with their constituencies sending out various signals on their ethical competencies and value systems [Gurviez 1999]. Such communicates may become signals of trustworthiness if they include coded promises such as company's commitment to societal goals. In such a way, CSR policies may serve as important antecedent of trust, which depends on the commonality of values between firms and their stakeholders. The discussion of the concept of identity as the framework for constructing relations with stakeholders follows in the next section.

3. The concept of identity and stakeholder relations

In the context of CSR communication, values could be defined as common beliefs on whether certain behaviors or goals are proper, important or good.

Values as well as corporate practices not only belong to the domain of organizational culture with its behavioral artifacts and rituals, but as such are fundamental for shaping organizational identities, "(…) in that they differentiate one organization from other organizations in the eyes of managers and stakeholders" [Scott, Lane 2000]. Understood this way, organizational identity is the "central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of an organization." [Albert, Whetten 1985] and a "set of beliefs shared between managers and stakeholders" concerning those characteristics [Scott, Lane 2000].

While at the individual level identity serves as a "cognitive image held by a member of an organization" [Dutton et al. 1994], at the organizational level it is a "collectively held frame, within which organizational participants make sense of their world" [Weick 1995]. Both individual and organizational levels of identity are reciprocally linked [Brown 1997; Elsbach, Kramer 1996]. This makes a construction of organizational identity a dynamic process based on "(…) reflection on the organizational events, policies and actions" [Scott, Lane 2000]. It is a sense-making and sense-giving exercise by nature. According to Gioia [1998], organizational identity "develop[s] over time in interaction with internal and external parties." This is what makes it different from organizational image, which relates broadly to how others see organizations [Dutton et al. 1994] and is therefore a projected representation of a firm and from reputation, which becomes a reflected representation of organizations as seen by others.

Scott and Lane [2000] suggested that individual identity is constructed in exchange with others, so it can be said that it develops within a network of relations.

Interestingly, both collective identity at the organizational level and a need for belonginess at the individual level are mentioned among corporate motives for engaging in CSR [Aguilera et al. 2007], thus implying that socially oriented values and in effect policies are a powerful tool, capable of providing a unifying environment through which strong organizational cultures are built.

Given the above, identity is mostly a relational concept grounded in the mechanisms of relating to other individuals with whom one works, communicates and interacts, based on the professional and social roles. Economically, such a relation towards others could be explained through the concept of other – regarding and acting on social preferences in accordance with a paradigm of maximizing utility. While this implies certain behavioral outcomes such as reciprocity, it does not allow for a full interpretation of a non-instrumental reciprocity.

Scott and Lane [2000] suggested that in order to make stakeholders more cognizant about organizational social identity, firms use various mechanisms. For example, managers reconstruct organizational identity on the basis of influence of stakeholders needs, beliefs and values; however, the strength of that influence depends on the perceived centrality of organization in the stakeholders network. That relational, stakeholder dimension of identity is very close to Brickson's organizational identity orientation concept, which attempts to capture distinctions between different organizational stances toward stakeholders and looks at the assumed nature of association between an organization and stakeholders as perceived by members. According to Brickson [2005, 2007], organizations demonstrate individual, relational and collectivistic identity, when they exercise a one-way communication with stakeholders, engage in dual, bilateral exchanges with specific stakeholder groups or engage in a two- way dialogue with stakeholder communities, respectively. On theoretical grounds, the role of CSR in building the relations with stakeholders has been captured in the stakeholder theory [Freeman 1999].

Considering the embeddedness of organizational identity in relations, both between organizational members and between organizations and their stakeholders and the centrality of stakeholders relation in the CSR paradigm, one could expect the increase of communication on firms' CSR activities to be the evidence that organizations construct their identities around CSR discourse in order to evoke certain reactions.

The following section elaborates on the detailed effects of CSR identity.

4. CSR behavioral outcomes

Ideally, CSR could be a good counterbalance for the information asymmetry, where stakeholders, specifically consumers, do not have sufficient or well-understood information to be able to make educated decisions of purchase or investment.

Nevertheless, there is a strong empirical evidence that mechanisms of CSR influence on individuals behavior and perceptions are very complex and often show a potential for distorting the stakeholders' assessment of a firm if not merely for window dressing, especially that perceptions of companies' CSR can be biased. For example, stakeholders extend their positive perception of a company on the basis of limited information about corporate engagements within one specific domain, which indicates that perceived CSR is prone to the halo effect [Smith et al. 2010].

Previous research shows that emphasizing certain corporate characteristics, such as CSR commitments and activity, can trigger positive attitudes among stakeholders [Lichtenstein et al. 2004], minimize reputational damage [Bhattacharya, Sen 2004] and protect a company from the negative impact of a crisis [Schnietz, Epstein 2005].

However, its impact on consumers' behavior is mediated by a number of variables such as a mode through which it is communicated [Sen, Bhattacharya 2001] or attributions and meanings assigned by consumers to CSR engagements, which eventually impact on their attitudes [Walker et al. 2010].

According to the attribution theory, an observer assumes that a certain behavior is performed to achieve a desirable outcome and then assumes there are underlying motivations driving the behavior [Weiner 1990]. Because of this perceived self-interest, consumers often question the credibility of messages emanating from a company [Yoon et al. 2006].

Ellen et al. [2006] posited that consumers attribute multiple and specific corporate motives to CSR engagement, which include strategic-driven (e.g., a firm wants to increase sales or mitigate harm), stakeholder-driven (e.g., CSR is enacted because of stakeholder pressures), and values-driven motives (e.g., a firm believes CSR is the right thing to do). Her research [Ellen et al. 2006] supported the predictions that values-driven and strategic-driven attributions would positively affect purchase intentions, while stakeholder-driven attributions would negatively affect purchase intentions. These predictions were contingent on the idea that consumers respond favorably to inherently altruistic (i.e. values-driven) corporate activities. Consumers also largely accept the notion that a core strategic goal of firms is to attract and maintain customers. Thus, consumers appear to accept CSR initiatives that are enacted to support the strategic goals of a firm (i.e., strategic-driven); however, they respond negatively when CSR efforts are enacted by pressure from stakeholders (i.e., stakeholder-driven) because such actions are perceived as forced and insincere.

Both purchase intent [Ellen et al. 2006] and attitudes towards a company [Groza et al. 2011] can be elicited by proactive CSR activity, although which types of CSR are more appealing depends largely on the individual characteristics of stakeholders. For example, the influence of local CSR activities on purchase intent is mediated by the level of global citizenship demonstrated by stakeholders [Russell, Russell 2010].

Specifically, individual's level of global citizenship behavior moderates the relationship between the location of a firm's CSR activities (e.g., domestic vs. foreign) and purchase intent. Individuals low in global citizenship behavior will identify with their home nation to a greater degree than individuals who are high in global citizenship. In consequence, location of CSR activity is less important to an individual who is high in global citizenship behavior. This has important implications for designing CSR policies in the context of local communities. Even though intuition suggests that small communities may be dominated by individuals high in the local citizenship scale, as opposed to big cities, where one may expect global citizenship to dominate, this is far from obvious. Global versus local citizenship is an individual-level feature; therefore, the effectiveness of CSR policies and their perceptions in accordance with what was intended may depend on a detailed knowledge of the structure of a targeted stakeholder group. More interestingly, there might be strong local differences in the very perceptions and attitudes towards business responsibilities and its role in a society. Research showed that dependence of business responsibility perceptions on demographic variables such as age, gender or education may be geographically specific, i.e. it shows only in some communities and is not universal [Fryzel 2011].

The influence of CSR on purchase intent has a number of antecedents such as enhanced brand image or consumer–company identification. Interesting empirical evidence for CSR identity generated outcomes is provided by experiments' based studies, where in most cases CSR identity was evoked through manipulated press releases or other forms of communication.

Auger et al. [2003] run a choice experiment to analyze how consumers value ethical features of a product when making a purchase and found that consumers are willing to pay a significant proportion of the value of a product for the specific ethical features a product contains. Perez et al. [2009] showed the complexity of previously confirmed effect of CSR image on brand attractiveness by demonstrating that CSR first magnifies the brand prestige and distinctiveness leading to a greater perceived attractiveness. Lee et al. [2012] investigated the efficacy of three corporate social responsibility initiatives – sponsorship, cause-related marketing (CRM), and philanthropy – on consumer–company identification and brand attitude and, in turn, consumer citizenship behaviors. CSR reputation is the moderating variable in this case that affects the relationship between CSR initiatives, C–C identification, and brand attitude.

Interestingly, the CSR induced distinguishing characteristics of a brand point towards the embeddedness of the relation between CSR activities and outcomes in organizational identity. A discrete choice modeling experiment was used by Marquina and Morales [2011] to test consumers' intention to purchase and establish their willingness to pay for specific social features. They also showed that consumers from various cultural backgrounds value CSR features differently.

Irrespectively of complexity of the effects of CSR on consumer decisions, it seems obvious that perceptions mediate most of them. Groza et al. [2011] studied the effects of CSR initiatives on attributions and showed that proactive initiatives generate more favorable attitudes towards a company and in consequence stimulate purchase intent. It was proposed that attributions play a mediating role in that relation, specifically that consumers perceive proactive CSR initiatives as more value- and strategic-driven rather than stakeholder-driven.

They also showed that attributions are influenced by the source of information, that is consumers perceive CSR initiatives as more value-driven when information comes from the internal source of a company.

In summary, CSR induced identity fosters purchase behaviors through a better perception of a company, stronger consumer–company identification and more positive attitudes towards a firm, although the strength and exact form of this influence is moderated by individual characteristics of consumers, such as their global citizenship and specific features of the communication process, such as a source of information (i.e. internal, firm generated source of information versus external, independent source of information such as press or NGOs).

Among the mediators of CSR influence on company behavior, such as stronger loyalty towards a firm or reduced risk perception, trust remains the one of a particular interest, given that its mechanism is not purely cognitive but is subject to emotions and can even be influenced by substances such as hormones [Kosfeld et al. 2005]. The following section discusses the role of trust as the antecedent of behavioral outcomes in recent empirical models of CSR and how it relates to perceptions.

5. Reputation, trust and role of perceptions

Trust is built on the basis of reputation. It depends on whether there are values common for both consumers and firms, which determine which forms of behavior are important, proper and good. Reputation can be looked upon as contingency factor in the models which link CSR with behavioral outcomes such as attitude, purchase intent and loyalty [Bhattacharya et al. 2008] or trust and identification [Du et al. 2010].

It has been shown that communication of CSR activities minimizes reputational damage [Bhattacharya, Sen 2004] and prevents a company from the consequences of an anticipated crisis situation [Schnietz, Epstein 2005]; however, intensifying the CSR communication once the crisis already occurred is known to create adverse effects [Ferguson 2010].

Reputation is vulnerable to inconsistencies between communicated CSR and actual CSR as stakeholders see them as a proof of a hypocritical corporate conduct [Wagner, Lutz, Weitz 2009].

One of the key factors in economic exchange, such as perceived risk is a result of perceived reputation and trust [Stanaland et al. 2011].

King-Casas et al. [2005] used multi-round trust game to predict trust and found that reputation building can be probed, as players develop models of one another through iterated exchange.

The increasing role of trust is seen in particular in the situations in which the number of possible choices increases [Blomqvist 1997]. Trust reduces transaction costs [Dyer, Chu 2003], specifically the *ex-post* costs, i.e. those of monitoring and execution. It is a key variable in relational marketing and one of the determinants of brand loyalty [Bibb, Kourdi 2004].

Swaen and Chumpitaz [2008] demonstrated that perceived CSR influences the level of trust in a company through various intermediaries such as perceived quality and satisfaction. They indicated that CSR is a determinant of perceived quality and that CSR activities make people trust that a company will fulfill the terms of an exchange and perform as expected. Interestingly, they show that particularly in product categories where competition is intense and rivals propose very similar products and services, CSR activities might be used to differentiate a company's product offer in customers' eyes and strengthen its relationship with them, which might be the case for example in financial investment products, where competition is fierce and more importantly, a vast number of customers operate under uncertainty and with limited expertise, often acting on advice.

Similarly, Pivato et al. [2008] suggest that trust is a key mediator capable of measuring and explaining success (or failure) of CSR policies adopted by a company.

Socially oriented companies can achieve competitive advantage in those business areas where trust is crucial in determining consumer choices. Consumers who perceive a retailer as socially oriented, demonstrate more trust towards it, which results in an intention to purchase a product [Pivato et al. 2008].

To sum up, a general level explanation of the described phenomena is that it is moral behavior that establishes trust. The above-mentioned empirical evidence makes trust directly or indirectly responsible for shaping stakeholder's behavior and indicates implicitly that it is sensitive to socially and ethically loaded constructs, of which CSR paradigm is a prime example.

6. Conclusion

Last few decades saw a fundamental shift in paradigms, governing both theoretical thinking about the ways business should be done and management practice. Changing balance between the private and the public sector and strong patterns of interrelatedness between various market actors sparkle a heated debate about the legitimacy of social claims towards firms between proponents of shareholder versus stakeholder value. As organizations succumb to growing social pressures from various stakeholders obliging them to adopt socially responsible policies, they also learn how to innovate on corporate policies and strategies by using CSR to stimulate certain outcomes and, quite effectively, as the recent empirical evidence shows.

The magnitude of discussion stimulated by CSR as well as the quickly building body of evidence of its influence on markets and individuals, makes it a powerful paradigm, often used by firms to differentiate itself from others. Organizations are more than social collectives and in many respects are treated as if they were individuals with powers to act and with assigned responsibilities [Scott 2003]. Thus specific identities formed with CSR messages and policies as building blocks become a natural consequence of strategy which forces firms to accommodate multi-stakeholder interests in their core business. The significance of CSR-based identity relates to the fact that using a socially loaded terminology it appeals to emotionally embedded needs for doing good and shapes perceptions and in consequence behavior of market actors. If one can agree that "(…) organization's CSR efforts define its level of social justice" and as such become a "(…) heuristic for fairness" [Aguillera et al. 2007], one could see the economic significance of such a mechanism, which by stimulating reciprocity can make a true social change.

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CSR, TOŻSAMOŚĆ ORGANIZACYJNA A ZACHOWANIA. ROLA PERCEPCJI I ZAUFANIA

Streszczenie: Tekst rozważa rosnące znaczenie dyskursu o społecznej odpowiedzialności przedsiębiorstw (CSR) jako podstawy tworzenia tożsamości organizacyjnych. CSR jako dominujący paradygmat organizacyjny ostatnich kilku dekad jest pokazany jako czynnik stymulujący określone zachowania oraz pozwalający na wyróżnienie się przedsiębiorstwa z otoczenia. Tekst rozpoczyna się prezentacją istniejącej wiedzy na temat efektów behawioralnych generowanych przez CSR. Omawiane są badania empiryczne z obszaru studiów organizacyjnych, zarządzania, marketingu oraz literatury dotyczącej tożsamości, które wskazują, iż podejście firm do CSR ma kluczowe znaczenie dla kreowania wzorców identyfikacji konsumentów z firmą, lojalności, pozytywnego nastawienia do firmy, a w efekcie intencji zakupu. W dalszej części przedstawiany jest koncept tożsamości organizacyjnej z centralną rolą interesariuszy. W końcowej części artykułu dyskutowana jest rola zaufania oraz percepcji jako istotnych determinant intencji zakupu. Myślą przewodnią prezentowanych poglądów jest teza, iż mechanizm tworzenia określonych zachowań i postaw aktorów rynkowych, dzięki stosowaniu paradygmatu CSR w zarządzaniu, ma potencjał wykreowania rzeczywistej zmiany społecznej, jeśli dzięki temu wzmocnieniu ulegną relacje wzajemności oparte o standardy sprawiedliwości społecznej.

Słowa kluczowe: CSR, tożsamość organizacyjna, interesariusze, percepcje.